

# My Site's Climate Change Stories Worksheet

## Example Answers for a Cultural Park

This worksheet is for broad thinking about your site's climate change stories – list as many ideas as you can think of and talk to others at your site for more input and inspiration.

**Park/site name:** *Homestead National Monument*

### Step 1 – Potential Site Connections to Climate Change

Based on your pre-course interview, and your current knowledge of how climate change relates to your site, make a list of everything at your site that has a link to climate change – such as resource impacts, impacts to visitor experience, impacts to public perception, historical connections, and/or in providing access to primary park themes or management goals. What can be understood or communicated about climate change because of your site's resources and stories? What is lost – or gained – at your site because of climate change? Think broadly. This is your starter list for potential climate change stories at your site.

***Tangibles or topics:** native and non-native species (plants, animals, insects); weather patterns and weather events; soil moisture; Cub Creek; floods and droughts; the Dust Bowl; prairie fires (natural and prescribed); inventory and monitoring program; farming practices (historic and modern); agribusiness; energy sources and energy consumption; sustainability; pollution; carbon release and/or sequestration of native vegetation vs croplands (?); diminishing productivity and potential food scarcity; pioneer lifestyles and consumption...*

***Resource Impacts (also potentially affecting visitor experience):** degradation of native prairie due to proliferation of non-native species (brome), unknown impacts on already threatened species (regal fritillary), changes that affect timing and intensity of prescribed fire regime, shifts/trends in severity of weather events affecting flooding of Cub Creek and risk of tornados; potential trend toward warming winters; increase in length and/or severity of droughts; phenology shifts indicated by changes in timing of bird migrations and flowering of native plants...*

***Historical Significance:** comparative shifts in climate patterns through time such as the difference between early pioneer times and the Dust Bowl era vs today; how human activities contributed to the climate catastrophes of the Dust Bowl; energy consumption of typical homestead family vs today; pioneer adage (use it up, wear it out, make due or due without) vs our consumer habits today and effects on energy consumption; efforts of the park's sustainability program as examples to the surrounding communities; the park's restored prairie demonstrates the hardiness/adaptability of native plants to weather extremes and climate shifts vs vulnerability of modern monoculture crops; the post-Dust Bowl emergence of landscape restoration efforts vs efforts at landscape and species preservation/restoration in the face of climate change; proliferation of gas-powered farm equipment and other agricultural "advances" and relationship to the Industrial Revolution...*

### Step 2 – Identify Potential Audiences

Think about and list your potential audiences for climate change interpretation -- both existing audiences and possible underserved or outreach audiences. Of the audiences you have listed here, which ones do you need to learn more about regarding their perspectives on climate change?

*Local and regional – farm families, local business groups, agribusiness groups, elementary school groups (elementary, junior and senior high), teachers, Scouts, seniors, local walkers, migrant workers and families, UNL students, church/faith groups, growing Hispanic and African American populations, American Indian groups...I need to learn more in general about the last five groups in this list, but especially for climate change.*

*Broader audiences – distance learning school groups, national park visitors from across the country and the world, homestead descendants, genealogy buffs, history buffs, Lincoln buffs, women's history buffs, African-American history buffs, Native American history buffs, prairie buffs, agricultural history buffs, farming heritage families and individuals, Passport stamp collectors, bird watchers... I have pretty good general knowledge of these groups, but not so much understanding of how they might perceive climate change.*

### **Step 3 – Identify Audience Relevance**

Next, explore and list the ways for your potential audiences to find personal relevance with the issue of climate change at your site. Why might they be interested in the climate change story at your site? How does the climate change story relate to their personal interests and experiences? Identify the “so what” -- why should they care on a personal level? By answering these questions, you can begin to think strategically about how to provide experiential opportunities for your visitors to connect in a personal way to your site's unique climate change story.

*A number of our visitors arrive with some interest in agriculture and farming heritage and may best be able to relate to modern climate change by connecting to the climate shifts that resulted in the Dust Bowl and the massive degradation, loss and suffering that resulted to farm families and their livelihoods.*

*Issues of water resources and water shortages are also generally important to residents of the Great Plains and the Southwest.*

*A public health frame or an energy independence frame might also resonate with local and regional audiences.*

*Ingenuity and inventiveness in the development of alternative energy sources can be related to the ingenuity and inventiveness that spurred the agricultural revolution of the Great Plains – and could provide an opportunity to connect to sustainability and conservation efforts that can help families save money.*

*The possible link between climate change and extreme weather events on the prairie has increasingly broad relevance and interest, as weather patterns shift across the country and the world. The reliance of homestead families on fairly stable climate patterns can be connected to the lives of Great Plains families today – and can be used as a way to help all audiences think about the many ways that climate plays a role in our survival.*

*A great variety of birds, plants and animals are easily witnessed on the prairie trails and are an important aspect of audience experience, and the reason for many repeat visits. The shifting phenology patterns due to climate change will be of interest, and perhaps concern, for these audiences.*

### **Step 4 – Identify Goals**

List possible goals for interpreting climate change at your site. What does your site want to achieve with climate change interpretation? What types of management goals do you want to address? What

interpretive goals do you want to address? What types of visitor experience goals might also be important to consider?

*Interpreting climate change connects to the park interpretive goals of using the homesteading story to help the public connect the past to the present and the lessons learned from the pros and cons of our agricultural heritage. We can also connect to the goals of our park's sustainability program to increase public awareness and model responsible environmental best practices. A goal of the parks' Prairie Management Action Plan is to increase public awareness and appreciation for sustainable management of Great Plains soil and water resources, which can be directly connected to climate change in several ways. Visitor experience goals might include providing a variety of experiential opportunities to enhance and expand personal relevance and enrichment related to learning about climate change and sustainability, and providing engagement opportunities tailored to specific groups who currently visit, including families, school groups, tour bus groups, bird watchers, church groups and Scouts, and in outreach activities for underserved groups such as college groups from UNL and ethnic community centers in Lincoln and Omaha.*

## **Step 5 -- Identify Interpretive Themes**

Based on all of your thinking above, begin to craft some potential interpretive themes (theme statements or theme questions) that might be used for different interpretive venues or media products at your site. Include an aspect of audience relevance in each theme.

*The prairie restoration at Homestead NM illustrates the inherent hardiness and resilience of native plant communities as well as their vulnerability to the effects of climate change, and can help us consider our own resilience and vulnerabilities as humans.*

*The pragmatic consumption ethic of the homesteaders – “use it up, wear it out, make due or due without” – can help us consider our modern consumer habits.*

*Daniel Freeman chose his 140 acres here because of a reliable source of water in Cub Creek, but homesteaders who didn't have a reliable source of water, were doomed to failure. How important is a reliable source of water in our modern lives?*

*Technological advances in agriculture during the Homesteading era enabled the “conquest” of the “Great American Desert” to become the “breadbasket of the world.” Can technology and human inventiveness prevent the desertification of the Great Plains due to climate change? Will technology “save” us? What do you think?*

*The Homestead Prairie is a great place to watch nature. But the amazing cycle of the prairie – the blooming plants, the migration of birds along the Central Flyway, and the colorful change of seasons -- appears to be shifting. How might these changes affect the prairie ecosystem? How might these changes affect us?*

## **Step 6 – Potential Interpretive Venues and Strategies**

How does climate change fit into existing interpretive services? Are there programs where you could include a climate change story? Could you develop a stand-alone climate change program at your site? Identify existing services or new opportunities for climate change interpretation. Begin thinking about interpretive approaches, methods or strategies.

**Shorter-term possibilities – can do them without long-term planning or funding:** Integrate questions about climate change into the existing water quality monitoring activity for 4th grade school groups. Develop a Citizen Science Activity Guide for inventory and monitoring of phenology events. Develop a “Question of the Month” display for the VC bulletin board to provoke conversations about climate change and sustainability linked to the “lessons of the prairie.” Develop a pioneer trunk activity for families that explores the topics of consumerism, sustainability and survival. Revise the prairie trail site bulletin to a theme of climate change-related questions linked to the meanings of resilience and vulnerability. Develop a set of questions/conversation points to spark climate change-related conversations during trail roving on the prairie.

**Longer-term possibilities -- will require more planning time and funding:** Revise the prairie trail waysides to posit thought-provoking questions connecting the prairie to climate change through the meanings of resilience and vulnerability. Develop a short video for the VC Theater with interviews from UNL researchers about climate shifts on the Great Plains and offer a facilitated dialogue opportunity to explore the ramifications. Host a Farmers Market during Homestead Days and invite organic farmers to demonstrate sustainable garden tips and techniques. Offer a facilitated dialogue program during Homestead Days in conjunction with the vintage tractors display to explore questions about technology and sustainability.